

Panthers Not Gun-Happy

BY ROY WILKINS

Judging by the reaction of a substantial segment of the public, the Black Panthers are regarded as unique devils who have brought firearms for the first time into the argument over social issues.

A survey on the stockpiling of guns, bombs and other weapons shows the Panthers to be pikers in the illegal arms race. The totals send shivers through ordinary citizens. The dread weapon, the submachine gun, is a favorite of the haters and destroyers. "We have no idea how many machine guns and submachine guns are floating around the country," said a division chief of the Treasury Department agents.

When the organizer of the Minutemen, an ultra right-wing group, was arrested last year he and a companion were reported to have had 48 weapons in their house. Unless a record has been lost or not reported, this total is more by far than has ever been found in a Black Panther raid.

And the Panthers must take a back seat, also, to the haul reported last April from an Illinois Minuteman: 605 Thompson submachine guns, bought as scrap metal, but restored to excellent working order by the Minuteman gunsmith. In addition, the Treasury men found 43 rifles, shotguns and pistols, 8 M-2 carbines and 58 anti-tank grenades. In contrast to the Panthers, who declare they use arms only for defense, the Minutemen freely assert that they intend to use their arms against Negroes and Jews. These two, they say, are a part of the Communist conspiracy to take over the United States.

The government men say members of the Ku Klux Klan have been building arms caches and, in general, that right-wing groups appear to be more active in the gun business than others. The left-wingers, with some exceptions, tend to shy away from guns because "they say it just gives the police an excuse to arrest them." In this some of the lefties are smarter than other tiny, talkative minorities who persist in the suicidal tactic of police baiting.

Although the Panthers get a big mention, guns actually found among them are very small in number, compared to the finds in raids on other groups.

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There is no advocacy here of a shooting war between small groups of both races, nor any justification of the oft-repeated Panther declaration that "power comes out of the barrel of a gun." It does so as long as one has more guns or more men than the enemy. When the ratio switches, the end is in sight. Hitler had the edge in 1939, but not in 1945. The Thousand-Year Reich lasted 12 years, half of them in a shooting war. Black Americans fear a gun dictatorship, whether the triggermen are white or black.

For those who care enough to study an explosive situation, fraught with virulent racial prejudice, exacerbated by poverty and the manifold ills of urban living, the record is that the Panthers, despite their wild rhetoric and fantastic boasts, are far from the biggest gun threat to the U.S.A. Indeed, they just could be as nearly truthful as propagandists ever get when they say they have guns only for defense.

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